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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR WHA/BSC, WHA/USOAS, WHA/PDA AND DRL
NSC FOR TOMASULO
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SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ABUSES INCREASE IN MATO GROSSO DO SUL
STATE

REF: A) Sao Paulo 39 B) Sao Paulo 117 C) Sao Paulo 170

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Summary

1. (SBU) Mato Grosso do Sul's indigenous population faces some of the harshest conditions among the native populations of Brazil. Government officials and landowners deny the extent of human rights abuses occurring in the state, but activists and the indigenous themselves recount stories of land theft, forced labor, beatings, and murder. As the size of the state's indigenous population grows and comes into increasing contact with the non-native Brazilian farmers and ranchers, opportunities for mistreatment are increasing. Mato Grosso do Sul State's indigenous conflicts demonstrate the need for more forceful actions by the Government of Brazil. End Summary.

Dourados and Kaiowa Guarani "Disaster"

2. (SBU) Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), whose name means "southern thick forest," is a state of approximately 2.3 million inhabitants situated on the borders of Bolivia and Paraguay in Brazil's central-west region. MS is home to 60,000 native Brazilians, the second largest indigenous population in Brazil after Amazonas State in the country's north. During a three-day visit by Poloff to Mato Grosso do Sul State, Catholic University of Dom Bosco Professor Antonio Brandt, one of Brazil's most prominent historians of the indigenous, presented an overview of the community's struggle in the state's southern region. Indigenous residents from the Kaiowa Guarani tribe located near the city of Dourados live in some of the worst conditions in Brazil. Calling the situation there a "disaster," Brandt repeated stories regularly highlighted in the media noting severe malnutrition, particularly among children; extreme poverty and lack of healthcare; rampant alcoholism; violent

crime; and, most infamously, a regular pattern of suicides. Brandt blamed Brazil's decision in 1928 to create eight indigenous reservations on a tiny portion of their traditional homelands as the culmination of a long series of discriminatory acts against the indigenous. Because the government believed the native Brazilians would assimilate into the general population, the GOB did not grant the indigenous sizeable territories in the state. When white farmers began planting soy in large quantities in the 1950s and 1960s, and sugar mills began operating in the 1980s in the region, the Kaiowa Guarani found themselves forced onto even smaller living spaces.

13. (SBU) Brandt explained that the continued displacement and removal of indigenous peoples from native lands in the 1980s and 1990s directly led to a high rate of suicide similar to that recorded during the period of the European arrival and Jesuit mission expansion. In one reservation of 9000, more than 160 Guarani committed suicide between 1990 and 1999, a rate that was 26 times higher than in the general Brazilian population at the time. (Note: During the week Poloff visited the state, local media covered a story in which an indigenous teenager unable to find work shot himself in the face in front of his parents. Out of desperation at seeing his only son take his own life, the child's father took the rifle and killed himself at his wife's side. End Note.)

14. (SBU) Human rights contacts told Poloff that the Dourados area indigenous, who have insufficient land to follow their traditional practices including growing crops, and no access to natural food sources from rivers and forests, are also facing the murder of community leaders by white farmer-hired mercenaries who seek to extend their lands. Additionally, the indigenous are forced to reside in areas not able to accommodate their numbers (12000 indigenous live on less than 3000 hectares); lack educational,

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vocational or leisure opportunities for youth; have no job availability for adults; and completely rely on government subsidies including food baskets. These "reservations" are too small for such populations to sustain themselves through traditional methods. Brandt said that the government's National Foundation for the Indian (FUNAI) has a responsibility to improve the situation, including demarcation of the Guarani Kaiowa territories and then buying back lands sold to farmers. (Note: Unfortunately, in some case evens, congressionally-demarcated lands have been kept from indigenous occupation by Supreme Court injunction, demonstrating the political power of local landowners. End Note.)

Terena Indigenous Also Face Challenges

15. (SBU) Aivone Carvalho, a Catholic University of Dom Bosco anthropologist and historian of indigenous culture, further highlighted the dire situation of the indigenous in MS as a whole. Carvalho, who is the curator of the Dom Bosco Museum, a research and cultural institution preserving tribal heritages and receiving support and training from the Smithsonian Institution, said that the Brazilian Government gives limited support to the indigenous and when it does distribute some assistance to the states or cities to help native Brazilian communities, politicians and public officials squander the funding for unrelated programs or outright "steal the money".

16. (SBU) Poloff traveled with Carvalho to Bokoti (or Mbokoti, "Cachoeirinha" in Portuguese, meaning "small waterfall"), inhabited by about 5000 indigenous Brazilians from the Terena tribe. The community of five indigenous villages, surrounded by productive pasturelands typical of land that has turned the state into an agricultural powerhouse, is a paradigm of the type of situation that often leads to violent conflict between white farmers and indigenous Brazilians. Along the edge of Bokoti is the large estate of former state Governor and Senator Pedro Pedrossian. According to Carvalho, Bokoti residents and other indigenous rights activists familiar with the local situation, Pedrossian's farm occupies hectares of land claimed by the Terena. The former politician's land holdings grow each year at the expense of the Terena who do not have access to judges and politicians approving or recognizing demarcation

boundaries. (Note: Poloff was unable to independently verify these accusations. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) When visiting the grouping of villages itself, Poloff saw a well-organized and inviting collection of modest homes, but as throughout Brazil, the public school was dilapidated and job opportunities scarce. Unlike in many other indigenous communities, however, a National Foundation for Health (FUNASA) clinic provides services to residents with a full-time nurse and a physician who visits 2-3 times a week. (Comment: The clinic and staff are a huge government concession to Bokoti: many indigenous villages throughout Brazil are lucky to have any medical support at all, let alone regular staffing. Bokoti's relatively large population and the Terena's history of support for the GOB stretching back to the nineteenth century likely help explain why FUNASA has such a presence in the community. End Comment.)

Conflicts Exist Throughout State

¶8. (SBU) Paulo Angelo de Souza, president of the Marcal de Souza Center for Human Rights (CDHMS), stressed that Bokoti is atypical in its organization and government support and is not representative of the state and national struggle for native Brazilian rights. Souza repeated statements made by others that the Terena have historically sought to accommodate living side-by-side with outsiders and have been willing to negotiate even when their land was being taken from them. Echoing previous contacts on indigenous rights, Souza said that demarcation of their territories is the most important

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concession the indigenous need today. In MS, the demarcation battle has turned particularly violent, Souza said, noting an increase in what appear to be hired assassinations by non-native Brazilian farmers. Activists recorded a total of 20 land dispute murders in 2006 in the state and Souza claimed that in 2007, out of a total of 76 land dispute assassinations nation-wide, 48 indigenous were murdered in MS alone. (Note: The Catholic Church-affiliated Indigenous Missionary Council, CIMI, one of the most respected organizations working for indigenous rights, also uses these figures. End Note.)

¶9. (SBU) Highlighting additional cases of native Brazilian mistreatment, Souza said that drug traffickers from Paraguay take advantage of those indigenous who live on the Brazilian side of the border to bring in illegal substances (Note: This problem is not unique to MS: FUNAI has highlighted Ticuna tribe members being used as cocaine traffickers in Amazonas State near the Peruvian and Colombian borders. End Note.) Souza added that forced labor is sometimes an issue as well because indigenous Brazilians do not always have an understanding of modern labor protections (Ref B). A recent case in an ethanol and sugar mill near the municipality of Rio Brilhante exposed the fact that 700 indigenous were working in sub-human conditions, Souza said. (Note: Media reports highlight that indigenous workers are used in forced labor in various states throughout Brazil. End Note.)

¶10. (U) On March 18 members of a United Nations team which had published a human rights report in March 2007 on Brazil publicly admonished the country for ignoring the UN's requests for information regarding violations of indigenous rights. UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Miloon Kothari complained that the GOB was not following up to guarantee the indigenous adequate territory or other basic freedoms. His report also specified cases such as when landowner-hired mercenaries raped an indigenous mother as they simultaneously beat her husband and son. According to the same report, local police officers also attacked some of the family's tribesman, claiming that the community planned to invade neighboring white-owned farms. However, the GOB alleges that it has responded to all of Kothari's reports, detailing the indigenous situation in general and in all specific cases mentioned in the document.

Indigenous Rights from Another Perspective

¶11. (SBU) Jose Mandu, Supervisor for Intelligence of the MS State Secretariat for Justice and Public Security (SEJUSP) dismissed human

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rights complaints about conflicts between the indigenous and farmers. Responding to allegations of violence targeting native Brazilians, Mandu claimed that this is a historical rather than a current phenomenon. While admitting that drug trafficking is a serious public security concern due to MS's porous borders (Ref C), Mandu said he had no concrete evidence the indigenous were being used as "mules" to bring in narcotics. Finally, addressing land conflicts, Mandu claimed that according to SEJUSP statistics, only one violent clash occurred last year, resulting in one indigenous death. (Comment: this figure is in stark contrast to that presented by human rights activists and indigenous contacts, possibly because Mandu did not want to admit the gravity of the situation in light of a visit of a U.S. Consulate officer. End Note.)

¶12. (SBU) First Secretary Dacio Queiroz da Silva of the Federation of Agriculture and Livestock (FAMASUL), an organization that represents the state's large landowners, also refuted claims that major issues existed between farmers and the indigenous. Noting that he was also president of FAMASUL's Technical Committee on Indigenous and Land Issues, Silva stated that the relationship between farmers and native Brazilians has improved significantly in the past few years. According to Silva, landowners do not oppose indigenous rights. Native Brazilians, however, cannot expand their

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land while violating farmers' property rights. He argued that in many cases, the indigenous, seeking to acquire new territories, claim without providing concrete evidence that their tribes inhabited certain areas and therefore have ownership rights.

Comment

¶13. (SBU) The indigenous rights situation in MS is much more than a "he said, she said" dispute between people who see things in a fundamentally different way. Both the indigenous murder rate and the UN inquiry highlight the serious human rights abuses to which the native Brazilian population is subjected in the state and, in fact, throughout the country. It remains incumbent upon the Government of Brazil to seek solutions to these problems. Completion of land demarcations, offering training and opportunities in understanding the community's rights and obligations, and enhancing public security measures will help ameliorate the situation. The one thing that remains clear is that without a more proactive stance by the GOB, this issue will not solve itself. End Comment.

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